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Remarks on Several Gandhāra Pieces

by FRANCINE TISSOT

In this month of May 2003, resounding with the echoes of war, I undertake another struggle in this article dedicated to the memory of Professor Maurizio Taddei. His personality marked my studies on a subject that was dear to us both: Gandhāra art. Our meetings, never frequent enough, always ended with a review of recent books and articles. These documents, all fresh from the press, contained new and often ugly pieces concerning Gandhāra that left us looking at each other in some astonishment. When they were really badly constructed or even ridiculous a smile was enough to dispose of them. But there were also some cases that were more difficult and indeed more alarming.

The plethora of Gandhāra works appearing on the international scene starting more or less with the end of World War II should have astonished specialists and researchers: this apparently was not the case.

Everyone knows however that workshops where excellent craftsmen work exist in Pakistan. They were formerly limited in number, located somewhere along the Northwest Frontier, although their works were of an excellent quality. It is some of these that I wish to study again here while thinking of Maurizio Taddei.

An analysis like the one I have begun here cannot in theory be performed unless the objects can be studied in situ and *in vivo*. Although I personally was able to see stele 1527 in the museum of Peshawar, the *bodhisattva* 135 in the museum of Lahore and the Trampisch *bodhisattva*, so-called when it was located in Paris, I never had the opportunity to see the DeMarteau stele in Brussels and the so-called Horiuchi *bodhisattva* in Japan, which I deeply regret. However, time marches on, the years pass, and it is perhaps preferable to say a few words on the subject now.

The year 5, or DeMarteau, stele, from the name of one of its early owners ⁽¹⁾ currently belongs to a Japanese collection (Fig. 1).

Professor J. Harle wrote one of the first commentaries on this item as early as 1973. He was careful to note that an almost identical stele has been conserved as number 1527 at the Peshawar Museum in Pakistan since the time of its discovery

⁽¹⁾ The base of the year 5 stele is 0.14 to 0.15 thick. Numerous articles and reproductions, including Kurita 1988, P 3 VIII.



Fig. 1 - Stele of the year 5, also known as the DeMarteau stele, schist, h. 0.62, w. 0.60. (Private collection, Japan).

(Fig. 2). The time of its discovery is confirmed by a photo by the Archaeological Survey of India of the time ⁽²⁾ where one finds a pile of statues and reliefs at the site of monastery D of Sahri-Bahlol, awaiting to be transported towards a place of conservation, namely Peshawar museum. The almost total similarity of the two items did not inspire long commentaries from all those authors who are interested in this stele for the good reason that a very important peculiarity attracted all the specialists' interest: the presence of a *kharoṣṭhī* inscription on the base of the item.

And yet, the two steles are oddly similar in the smallest details of their composition. They differ only in a few elements although these differences are

self-explanatory. The height of the DeMarteau stele is some 8 centimeters taller than item 1527. This can be explained by the greater height of the base, but above all by the larger volume of the mango tree forming the dais above the head of the Buddha, or by the measures taken earlier and subject to caution. It should also be noted that the available photos have not always been taken from the same angle or at the same height, which may cause the overall view to vary.

One more striking difference is the alternation of the location of the two *bodhisattvas* (see Figs. 1-2). This leads to a peculiarity – the absence of the upper part of the Avalokiteśvara on stele 1527. We shall come back to the consequences of this absence later.

I mention that I have never to date encountered (although it is true that I am by no means familiar with the whole set of ancient Gandharan items) such similar steles forming a kind of 'pendant' in a chapel for example. This remains to be investigated and could form the object of a long research. However, let us not confuse the issue: the 'subject' has often been treated, in particular at Sahri-Bahlol, although with some differences: alternating *bodhisattvas*, variations in the acolytes, decorations, etc. Here are two examples (Figs. 3-4), although several others exist.

Some further minor remarks: the Maitreya located on the left of the DeMarteau relief has lost its left arm, its moustache is practically non-existent and it comes up to

⁽²⁾ The stele is photographed *in situ* in Spooner: 1907-1908, cl. Indian Office 1213. The photo is reproduced in Tissot 2003: fig. 63.5.



Fig. 2 - Stele no. 1527, schist, h. 0.54, w. 0.60, prov. Sahri-Bahlol. (Peshawar Museum).



Fig. 3 - Stele, schist, prov. Sahri-Bahlol, mound C. (Cl. Indian Office 1145).



Fig. 4 - Stele, schist, prov. Sahri-Bahlol, mound C. (Cl. Indian Office 1151).

the height of the Buddha's shoulder. These lesser details are not present on stele 1527. The Avalokiteśvara, of which the entire right hand side no longer exists on relief 1527, on the DeMarteau stele has half its right arm intact and above all a complete head with the small Buddha seated in the knot of the headdress identifying it. Nevertheless this head seems to be on a slightly smaller scale than that of the Maitreya. The right arm of the DeMarteau Buddha is carved out of a piece of schist and is fixed to its original location. It is difficult to determine whether an early artist could make use of such an artifice as the arms of the statues have very often broken off and have been disappeared. It is conceivable that this arm had recently been repaired. The lotus flower on which Buddha is seated or enthroned is more detailed on the DeMarteau relief, the small column emerging from the base in the center being present in both cases. Briefly, if it were possible to make a detailed comparison of the two steles, viewing them side by side and analyzing their materials, one would perceive the almost certainty of the copy of an original piece by a great ancient or modern artist, a possibility that has so far not been documented but which cannot be neglected.

The question of the inscription giving such enormous scientific value to the DeMarteau stele lies outside my province and I cannot comment on the discussions which greeted its appearance (see Bibliography). I can only point out that, in the light of recent information, it was carved from left to right. The stone cutter had to squeeze the letters at the actual end of the inscription due to lack of space and also because a minor accident had broken off the lower right corner of the base. This could well be evidence that the inscription was added to the stele after, perhaps even a long time after, its conception and execution, with all that this implies ⁽³⁾.

But let us go on to another series of examples.

I shall now refer to a description of one of the sites on the Sahri-Bahlol plain described by Dr H.W. Bellew and published in 1864 (see Tissot 1983: 570-76, fig. 2). Inside what he interprets as the interior of a ruined *stūpa*, he discovered *an idol*, which will become number 135 of the Lahore Museum (Fig. 5). The location of the find is already a mystery as the item had almost certainly been moved, perhaps to a 'safer place', before it was discovered by Bellew. The figure was catalogued as a *bodhisattva* Siddhārtha and it is immediately apparent that it represents a very young plump man with a thick head of curly hair falling over his shoulders. He has a very youthful, almost childlike, face. His jewellery, a collar necklace and a long necklace (a small surface crack on the left side), is decorated with 'cabochons' of different shapes and sizes but clearly evidenced. His *paridhāna*, draped at the waist, has one corner rolled forward without any trace of a belt and this corner falls low between

⁽³⁾ The only author who has questioned the authenticity of the year 5 stele is Tanabe 1988: n. 18. An indication of the meaning of the inscription was initially suggested to me verbally by Prof. Z. Tarzi of Strasbourg, and later by Prof. H. Falk of Berlin.



Fig. 5 - *Bodhisattva* Siddhārtha, schist, h. 0.50, prov. Sahri-Bahlol, Damami. (No. 135, Lahore Museum, Pakistan).



Fig. 6 - 'Trampisch' *Bodhisattva*, schist, h. 0.154. (Private collection, Japan).

the legs. On both legs, left and right, the folds of the *paridhāna* have been elaborated into large alternating elongated waves that mould them, leaving their forms clearly visible – details that are never found elsewhere, except in the two statues that will now be presented. Its finesse, charm and presence, linked to a perfect knowledge of the anatomy, make item 135 in the Lahore museum a true masterpiece.

A large statue that I shall call the Trampisch *bodhisattva*, from the name of its last western owner, was exhibited by a Paris merchant in the late 1980s before being exported to London and then to Japan where it was seen by A.M. Quagliotti in 1996 (Fig. 6).

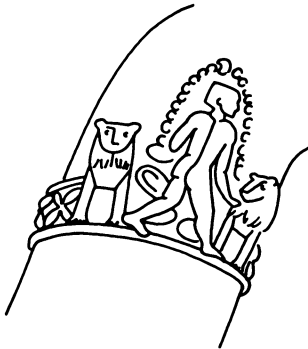


Fig. 7 - Detail of Fig. 6. Base.

Fig. 8 - Detail of Fig. 6. Long necklace.

Fig. 9 - Detail of Fig. 6. Armband.

Fig. 10 - Detail of Fig. 6. *Paridhāna* and its fringe on the left leg.

Standing on a probably authentic base, it has not been aligned with the main axis, something that shocks from the outset (Fig. 7). It has a flat body and the long necklace descending over the chest is irregular: on the left a horned animal is visible while on the right is a thick ring decorated with 'cabochons'. The central motif of the necklace is badly composed and the two sides differ appreciably (Fig. 8). The



Fig. 11 - Detail of Fig. 6.

Fig. 12 - *Bodhisattva*, Guides' Mess collection, probably from Sahri-Bahlol. (No. 2087A, Peshawar Museum).

right arm has been re-placed on the statue and is too distant from the body. Its armband (*keyūra*), the subject of which is an imitation of Hellenistic antiquity, is also a comparatively incongruous addition – (a young boy between two ‘baroque’ lions (Fig. 9). The *paridhāna* presents the interwoven wave pattern on the legs of the statue that were noted on the Lahore museum item 135. Furthermore, it is surrounded by a short fringe, clearly visible on the fold falling between the legs (Fig. 10). This decorative ‘fringe’ is never found on the Gandhāra statues of the finer periods. I shall conclude with a close-up view of the face with its fixed eyes and dilated pupils (Fig. 11). On comparing with a well known face of a *bodhisattva* in the Peshawar Museum (Fig. 12), the difference in interpretation may well be noted. One may be fairly certain that the head has been replaced on the body of the *bodhisattva* from the thin line of plaster that appears on the statues’ neck. The lower part of the body may be considered as original, despite the troublesome fringe. The upper part has been, in several points, reconstructed. This all adds up to a work presenting serious problems.



Fig. 13 - 'Horiuchi' Bodhisattva, schist, h. 0.97. (Private collection, Japan).

But then, to the astonishment of the specialists, we found a third work in an exhibition catalogue published by Mr Horiuchi and in the large two volumes publication by Mr Isao Kurita, both Japanese collectionists (Fig. 13). Kurita has no hesitation in attributing it to Sahri-Bahlol, which definitely proves he linked it with the Lahore item 135.

To this day it has not been proved that two similar pieces of quite different size were produced. I would go so far as to say that each Buddha, large or small, never really resembles another, but that, in aspects different from the way the clothing is folded, other details vary constantly from one item to another.

In the specific case of this Horiuchi *bodhisattva* and of its 'model', item 135, it is necessary to make a comparison detail by detail. One then perceives a less perfect finishing of the softer and plumper flesh, of the more pronounced folds and interweaving undulations. The head and face of the *bodhisattva* are somewhat out of proportion and are actually probably recent. The two necklaces are practically identical. This is, for the larger of the figures, a superb work. One hesitates between true or false. Only the history of the statue, which one does not know for the time being, can mark its origin, which seems to me to be extremely problematic.

The present research stops here for the moment. An unfortunately excessively large number of pieces are appearing at this very time on the world markets. Many of them would make us smile – Maurizio Taddei and myself.

I have described only a small number of them. They are quite spectacular and show those who set out to study Gandhāra art what the major present problem is – the fact of the dishonest circulation of copies of ancient masterpieces is gradually shifting the knowledge and taste of a public that has not attained a sufficient knowledge of the original works and is faced with excellent modern copies which are going to confuse its judgment.

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